

ORDEAL

1857

A HISTORICAL PLAY

by

M. MUJEEB



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FOREWORD

THIS play presents some aspects of the struggle of 1857 at Delhi which have generally been ignored by historians and politicians. Those who look upon the struggle as a 'mutiny' presume to have law and justice entirely on their side; those who raise it to the dignity of a war of independence overlook the implications of both 'war' and 'independence'. The excesses committed by both parties in the struggle have produced a bitterness which is not conducive to clear thinking.

The soldiers who mutinied at Meerut and elsewhere were able to gain support because of elements for whom the revolt of the army had a deep moral significance. We may disagree as to the measure of influence and power these elements possessed, specially because their aims and ideals were confused with the claims of nawabs, rajas, ranis and parasitical landlords and their hangers-on. But they were elements for whom freedom from foreign rule was a matter of conscience, and though they had not succeeded in formulating their idea of independence, their influence was widespread enough to make the struggle a people's struggle. It is the participation of the people on which this play concentrates, and it also makes an attempt, mainly by implication, to distinguish between issues that were relevant and those that were irrelevant.

The characters and incidents of this play are not entirely fictitious. Bakht Khan is a historical figure. There is evidence in regard to the participation of women, of the 'Kahars', of the Boys' Brigade. There may not be documentary proof for all the details, but the action of the play is in harmony with established historical facts. The exclusion of all that could cause hatred between the nations concerned or add to the bitterness which accounts of the events of 1857 usually create may be regarded as deliberate, because it does not help us to understand, or even see events in their proper perspective.

I would like to thank all those from whom I have had sympathy and encouragement, in particular Shri F. C. Mathur, of All India Radio, New Delhi, of whose knowledge of the period I have made ample use. I have also to thank the Editor of *Ajkal* for kindly permitting me to publish an English translation of the play.

Jamia Millia
24 December 1957

M. MUJEEB

A Glossary of Indian Terms is provided on p. 77.

Characters

(In order of appearance)

MIRZA MUGHAL : A son of BAHADUR
SHAH II

MUNSHI JWALA SINGH : His Secretary

RAM SAHAY MAL : A well-known Seth

RAJA NAHAR SINGH : Raja of Ballabhgarh

RAJAB ALI KOTWAL : Kotwal of Delhi

MOHAMMAD YUSUF : Court Jeweller

MUNNI : A singer

HAKIM AHSANULLAH : Physician, courtier and
adviser

SIDHARI SINGH. : An officer

SALMA : MOHAMMAD YUSUF'S
fiancee

WALI DAD, RAHIM,

SUKHDEO, HIRA : Soldiers

GENERAL BAKHT KHAN

COLONEL GAURI SHANKAR

A MAULVI

A JEHADI WOMAN, and other WOMEN

SOLDIERS in burqahs

KAHARS

A YOUNG MAULVI

CHILDREN of the "Boys' Brigade"

BHAGWATI : Wife of Seth RAM SAHAY
MAL

Four SOLDIERS in British army uniforms

RANI KISHAN KUNWAR : Wife of RAJA NAHAR
SINGH of Ballabhgarh

SOLDIERS, MEN and WOMEN SERVANTS,

MESSENGERS, MUSICIANS

ACT ONE

The Dewan Khana of MIRZA MUGHAL's palace. The stage is set for an evening of dance and song. MIRZA MUGHAL is seated on the masnad. RAM SAHAY MAL, MUNSHI JWALA SINGH, RAJA NAHAR SINGH, RAJAB ALI KOTWAL are seated somewhat nearer—MOHAMMAD YUSUF and some courtiers a bit further away. A WOMAN SERVANT is standing behind MIRZA MUGHAL and fanning him. Other SERVANTS are fanning the GUESTS or standing to one side with their arms folded. MUNNI, a singer, is sitting with her instrumentalists facing MIRZA MUGHAL. She is looking very depressed.

MIRZA MUGHAL: I say! What's happened to people today? They just don't come.... Munni Begum, I have a special request to make today.

MUNNI (*with a forced smile*): Whatever be Your Highness's pleasure.

MIRZA MUGHAL (*pointing towards NAHAR SINGH*): I have been trying for I don't know how long to persuade Raja Sahib to mix a little sweetness of city life in his rural austerity, but he salutes me with both hands and just doesn't agree.

MUNNI: But I think, Your Highness, the least word from you would reform anyone.

(*Nahar Singh looks embarrassed.*)

MIRZA MUGHAL: Yes, he has agreed today with

great difficulty—or rather, I should say, persuaded the Rani Sahib to agree. Well, what I wanted to say was that you might look after him a bit this evening. Use your darts and arrows, you know, to make him understand the finer points which we cannot bring home to him with our ordinary speech.... I wonder what he must be feeling with all this waiting to be gone through.

MUNNI: Your Highness, even waiting can become a pleasure. I have just put a ghazal of Munir Shikohabadi to music—if Your Highness wishes I could sing it.

MIRZA MUGHAL: Yes, yes, do—but please don't forget that the language of the Exalted Camp does not command understanding in Ballabhgarh.

NAHAR SINGH: Your Highness, Ballabhgarh may or may not be within the Exalted Camp, but we can see the Red Fort from there, and the winds that blow in Ballabhgarh come from Delhi.

MUNNI: True enough, Raja Sahib. A person can be educated even by the winds that blow . . . and now may I present you the ghazal?

(She sings.)

(HAKIM AHSANULLAH enters and motions MUNNI to stop singing. Everyone looks at him with surprise.)

MIRZA MUGHAL: I say, Ahsanullah, what's wrong? We were waiting so impatiently for the pleasure of your company, and now you've come and

stopped the fun.

AHSANULLAH: Your Highness, I confess to being rude and impertinent, but the times have changed—impertinence is the law of the land. One cannot afford now to behave properly or even to think of good manners.

MIRZA MUGHAL: Why, what's wrong?

AHSANULLAH: When I think of the grandeur of the Moghul Emperors and of the awe they inspired and compare it with what I see now I feel that loyalty demands I should go and drown myself. If I am alive today it is only because I have to fulfil my duty.

MIRZA MUGHAL: I know! I know! That's just how you begin your sermons: but tell us what's happened!

AHSANULLAH: What am I to tell you? Words fail me. The arrogance of the British was more than one could bear—today I have seen how insolent one's own countrymen can be The army in Meerut has mutinied. After killing and plundering there the mutineers have come to Delhi. They are demanding that His Majesty should become the Emperor of Hindustan.

MIRZA MUGHAL: And what did His Majesty say?

(AHSANULLAH is too furious to reply. Silence.)

NAHAR SINGH: Wasn't any faithful servant of His Majesty present when this happened?

AHSANULLAH: No. Your humble servant was summoned to talk to the rebels and be abused by them. I sent for Captain Douglas. I informed

Mr. Fraser. They could do nothing inside the Fort. What happened to them outside you will hear tomorrow and then you can decide whether His Majesty at his age can become the leader of the mutineers, fight the British army and feed a whole town. As for myself, I love and believe in my sovereign. But I am a physician, a loyal servant, and nothing more.

(A noise is heard near the Dewan Khana. Shouts of "Stop! Stop! Where are you going?" "Shut up, or we'll silence you with our guns." After a while SIDHARI SINGH enters with ten or fifteen armed SOLDIERS, stands at attention in front of MIRZA MUGHAL, salutes him and the SOLDIERS present arms.)

MIRZA MUGHAL: Hallo! Hallo! What's this?

SIDHARI SINGH (*salutes again*): Your Highness, we are your loyal servants. We have come to take orders.

AHSANULLAH: Your Highness, these fellows are blood-relations of the gang that insisted on paying its respects to His Majesty today and to discuss matters of high political policy with him. If you want to know what these fellows are really like, you have only to say something they don't want you to say.

SIDHARI SINGH: Your Highness, there is no doubt that we have been disobedient but we have only put our religion before our military service. We know that there are thousands and thousands of

people who, like us, are sick of British rule and would join us in the fight against it. But we are unknown in this country. Your Royal Family and you are the repositories of the honour of our country. We, and thousands like us, would be ready to die to fulfil your least command. We want you to lead us and guide us.

AHSANULLAH (*sarcastically*): And if, Your Highness, you show any reluctance, we shall shoot you and find some other figurehead.

(A SOLDIER raises his gun to shoot AHSANULLAH, but SIDHARI SINGH stops him.)

MIRZA MUGHAL (*disconcerted by the turn the conversation has taken*): I say! I say! What are you doing?

SIDHARI SINGH: Your Highness, we are soldiers. Either we take orders—thinking that he who gives the order is responsible for the consequences—or we refuse to take orders and realise that we have bared our chest before a gun and if we die we are responsible for it. We have refused to obey our officers, because we would rather lose our lives than our religion.

AHSANULLAH: Yes. And you think that the more people you have with you, the less chance there will be of your getting the punishment you deserve.

SIDHARI SINGH: You will find out soon how much we care for our lives, but what we feel is that others should risk their lives too to save our

religion and our country. If you join us, you will only be doing your duty, not conferring a favour on us.

AHSANULLAH (*sarcastically—turning away his face*):
Of course, of course.

MIRZA MUGHAL: Jwala Singh—let's hear what you've got to say.

JWALA SINGH: My Lord, my business is to keep accounts. You can spend as much money as you put in my charge and hold me responsible for the accounts. But I haven't any register where I can enter the income and expenditure of lives or beliefs.

NAHAR SINGH: Your Highness, ask a clerk questions which he is competent to answer and ask a Jat or a Rajput questions which it is his business to answer.

MUNNI: My Lord, some people have money and some haven't, but each of us has his life and if we are dealing in lives I think everybody has a right to be asked.

JWALA SINGH: How wonderful, Munni Begum! You have chosen just the right time to speak up. If it is a question of your life, I think both parties will be willing to sacrifice everything.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Munshi Sahib has by accident uttered something very profound.

AHSANULLAH: Munshi Sahib, this is not the time to get entangled in such questions. His Highness addressed himself to you so that you might throw a light on the aspects of this matter. All young men and all rowdies want to fight, but

you tell us whether this is the sort of fight in which kings and princes ought to join and if you think they should join, say where the money is to come from.

MUNNI (*taking off her jewellery and throwing it before SIDHARI SINGH*): General, if anyone talks to you about money, fling these things in his face.

AHSANULLAH: Don't be in such a hurry, Munni Begum. These fellows will themselves deprive you of all your ornaments. What else they'll take I wouldn't like to mention.

SIDHARI SINGH (*to AHSANULLAH*): I do not know who you are, and why you are talking in this way but I must tell you that it is too late for this sort of conversation. (*He looks towards a SOLDIER: the SOLDIER takes out something wrapped in a blood-stained cloth and gives it to SIDHARI SINGH. SIDHARI SINGH throws it before MIRZA MUGHAL and HAKIM AHSANULLAH.*) This is a hand that wielded the pen of government. Sometimes it patted us on the back—sometimes it slapped us in the face. We have cut it off and so long as we have our heads on our shoulders it will remain so; but remember that if we fail, you fail; and if we are killed, you will not survive. If this hand comes to life again it will bear witness against you also.

(MIRZA MUGHAL *cries out in horror. AHSANULLAH covers his face with his hands. RAM SAHAY MAL and JAWALA SINGH get up in a hurry, as if to run away. The faces of MUNNI,*

MOHAMMAD YUŞUF and NAHAR SINGH glow with a strange emotion. At this moment a MESSENGER comes in and pays his respects.)

MESSENGER: Your Highness. His Majesty wishes to see you.

MIRZA MUGHAL (*getting up quickly*): Very well, very well. I am just coming. Convey my respects to His Majesty. I shall present myself at once. (*He goes into the palace. The MESSENGER salutes and leaves. AHSANULLAH, JWALA SINGH and RAM SAHAY MAL get up to go. At a sign from SIDHARI SINGH two SOLDIERS stop RAM SAHAY MAL.*)

SIDHARI SINGH (*taking a paper out of his pocket and reading it*): You are Seth Ram Sahay Mal, aren't you?

RAM SAHAY MAL: Yes.

SIDHARI SINGH: I would request you to wait a while. We have some business with you.

NAHAR SINGH: Yes, yes, Seth Sahib. Come and sit down. Your money and our lives are now at stake.

MUNNI (*to SIDHARI SINGH*): General, how long will you stay on parade? Sit down and talk like a human being and, Raja Sahib, it is now your privilege to sit on the masnad (*mischievously*) even if you sit on your haunches!

(*This remark somewhat relieves the tension and creates an atmosphere of informality.*)

SIDHARI SINGH (*saluting*): Raja Sahib, your humble servant is called Sidhari Singh. I was a duffedar in the army. Since the mutiny my responsibilities have increased, but now I am at your service to perform any duties assigned to me.

NAHAR SINGH: Munni Begum has already called you General. I think we'll do the same. And now, let me introduce the others. This is Rajab Ali Sahib, the Kotwal of Delhi.

MUNNI: And you will not find in the old city a beauty whose silence is more meaningful and wonder-working.

NAHAR SINGH: And this is the Court Jeweller, Mohammad Yusuf.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: When the chapatis were distributed, we all ate them and offered them to others. Munni Begum insisted on eating them and had her share brought to her separately. We didn't know what eating the chapatis meant—we just trusted those who were distributing them. Chapatis were distributed here on behalf of Maulana Ahmadullah.

SIDHARI SINGH (*saluting again*): I came here with the intention of finding out how His Highness Mirza Mughal felt about this matter and, if possible, to persuade him to help in transforming this affair, which has begun with a mutiny of soldiers, into a war of independence. Those who presented themselves before His Majesty did not say things in the proper way and they failed to win favour. It seems I have failed too, but now

things have become very difficult. All the British officers in the city have been killed. It will be an achievement if we can keep our soldiers under control. But we can do nothing about the rowdies and mischief-makers of the city. They are bound to create trouble. They will plunder houses—and we shall be held responsible for all their offences. If you all do not wish to join us in the fight, at least help us in saving the citizens.

NAHAR SINGH: It's good that you've told us everything frankly. Now, Kotwal Sahib, what can we do?

RAJAB ALI: I, too, have eaten the chapatis and eaten them of my own free will, but I thought that if people were being organised to fight for freedom in this way, the actual fighting also would be according to some plan. But now we have only confusion.

SIDHARI SINGH: You are perfectly right, and I know it is we soldiers who are responsible.

RAJAB ALI: I wasn't accusing anyone, but whatever authority I have I exercise on behalf of His Majesty. My subordinates are His Majesty's servants. I cannot issue orders as I like; I must myself get the orders, otherwise I shall not be obeyed.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I know His Majesty has neither the age nor the temperament to decide things himself, and to decide quickly. We shall have to persuade him.

RAJAB ALI: I am a servant, not an adviser. His

Majesty can be advised only by those who are entitled to do so and whom he generally asks for advice.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: But this means that whatever is done will be done according to Hakim Ahsanullah's wishes!

RAJAB ALI: Yes, that is a fact.

SIDHARI SINGH: No, you are wrong: it will not be like that. We have arranged it so that His Majesty will have to support us, even if he doesn't wish to. We know he is old and weak and living on a pension, but we also know that he is indispensable.

RAJAB ALI: Well, if you can arrange things this way, I am at your service.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I have been waiting for an opportunity to tell you that I myself am with you heart and soul. At one time I was in the Boy's Brigade of the Court—after that I have had no military practice, but if I got arms, I think I would be able to use them.

MUNNI: And when shall I get a chance to speak?

SIDHARI SINGH (*surprised*): We are all attention.

MUNNI: I have been thinking for a long time of giving up this wretched profession of dancing and singing. Now, before all of you, I swear I *shall* give it up.

SIDHARI SINGH: I assure you I am happy to hear that, but what could you do for us?

MUNNI: I have offered you already the jewels I was wearing. If you send someone along with me I shall give him all that I have at home.

SIDHARI SINGH: I am sorry. I cannot agree to this.
MUNNI (*in a huff*): Very well. If you can't, you can't.

(She goes out.)

SIDHARI SINGH (*signalling to a SOLDIER*): Look, you go with her—if she doesn't get home safe and sound, I'll have you shot.

(The SOLDIER salutes and leaves.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: General, if you heard the story of this woman's life you would have a picture of the decline and fall of Hindustan before you. She has gone away angry, but I assure you you will see her on the battlefield some day.

SIDHARI SINGH: Well, but if from the very first day we begin to accept the jewellery of women to meet our expenditure and to enlist women in the army, with what face shall we meet the enemy?

NAHAR SINGH: In any case, Munni Begum has set a good example for Seth Sahib.

SIDHARI SINGH: Yes, that reminds me. We haven't yet talked of anything really important.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Sir, our business is to pray for free intercourse and peace. We cannot join in a war.

NAHAR SINGH: Seth Sahib, talk plainly, otherwise it may be bad both for you and for us.

RAM SAHAY MAL: I am your humble servant. I take orders.

NAHAR SINGH: It is not a question of giving and taking orders. We have to work together. I can undertake to keep the road from Ballabgarh to Delhi open. You undertake to find the money to pay for the food-grains.

RAM SAHAY MAL: How can one person find the money to feed a whole town? Supposing I do take the responsibility—who will believe that I can fulfil it?

NAHAR SINGH: Of course, you can't do it by yourself, but all the businessmen of Delhi together could do it. You know, all the goods that come to Delhi come through you.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Yes, sir. But what we give with one hand is returned to us in the other hand. If the hand that receives is cut off, the hand that gives cannot perform its function.

SIDHARI SINGH: But you know there is such a thing as sacrificing one hand to save the other.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Yes, if you talk of possibilities everything is possible.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Seth Sahib—if you don't mind, I'll tell you something. At the moment we know that soldiers have mutinied and entered the town. Now we can either look upon them as our enemies, or we can bargain with them, or transform their mutiny into a national struggle. I believe the last course would be the least dangerous for people in your position.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Yes.

(A MESSENGER enters and looks round.)

NAHAR SINGH: Well, what news have you brought?

MESSENGER: Sir, His Majesty has asked for His Highness.

NAHAR SINGH: His Highness has left—hasn't he reached the Fort yet?

MESSENGER: Sir, there is great confusion in the town. People are being beaten up: houses are being looted: and everybody is running hither and thither. I have risked my life coming here. Maybe I have come one way and His Highness has got to the Fort by another. It is possible he may be inside the palace here.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: You have come from the Fort, haven't you? Do you know what decision His Majesty has taken?

MESSENGER: Sir, His Majesty has agreed to become the Emperor of India. There has been a sort of declaration of war against the Company Bahadur.

SIDHARI SINGH: Long live Bahadur Shah, the Emperor of India!

ALL: Long live the Emperor!

NAHAR SINGH: Well, now you see everything is settled. Kotwal Sahib—you take charge of the town. Seth Sahib—you open your money bags.

(MIRZA MUGHAL enters from inside the Palace, followed by some SERVANTS.)

MIRZA MUGHAL: I say! What was that cry I heard just now?

(SIDHARI SINGH and, at a signal from him,

the SOLDIERS, present arms.)

NAHAR SINGH: Your Highness, your humble servants congratulate you. His Majesty has agreed to become the Emperor of India.

MIRZA MUGHAL (*at once assuming a lordly manner*): Gentlemen, I thank you . . . but does this mean that His Majesty has assumed full powers of Government?

NAHAR SINGH: Yes, Your Highness.

MIRZA MUGHAL: Hm . . hm . . Yes, very well. So now, Sidhari Singh, we make you General. We shall have an order to that effect issued under His Majesty's seal tomorrow. Now you take your soldiers away . . . (*to SERVANT*) Where has that Munni run off? Call her—call her at once . . . and call Munshi Jwala Singh too. Now he will have to open new accounts. He used to say we had no money—the fool.

(Curtain)

ACT TWO

The ladies' quarter of AHSANULLAH's house. It is about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. Nothing can be seen clearly except the faint outline of a wall back-stage and the arches of a dalan to the right. About the centre of the stage there is a bed on which SALMA lies asleep. After a while MOHAMMAD YUSUF is seen jumping over the wall. He comes and stands at the foot of SALMA's bed.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Salma!

(SALMA wakes up with a start. Seeing a man standing in front of her, she snatches a dagger from under her pillow and springs to the other side of the bed.)

SALMA: Who are you?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I am Mohammad Yusuf.

SALMA: Which Mohammad Yusuf? *(Suddenly recollecting their relationship, she takes up her dupatta, covers her head and turns her back towards him.)* I didn't know you were the sort of person who would come to see me in such a manner at such a time.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: If you have any faith in my good breeding, you must believe that it must be something very serious if I have come to you in such a way and at such a time. *(SALMA does*

not reply. She stands with her head bowed.)
The news of the disturbances in the city must have reached your ears. I have come to explain to you what they mean.

SALMA: Yes.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: You know that the British have occupied the whole of our country. The Mughal Empire has dwindled till one can hardly see it. The heir to the Mughal Empire is a pensioner of the Company.

SALMA: Maybe he is. What have I to do with it? The maintenance of the Mughal Empire is not my responsibility. Why should I be made to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning to be told about it?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: The Empire declined because the rulers were worthless people. We have not undertaken to maintain empires, but if we see that the disappearance of the Mughal Empire has left us without dignity and honour . . .

SALMA: A man keeps or loses his honour himself. Others are not responsible for it.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes, but if there are people who are our enemies, and powerful enemies, the honour of individuals cannot be saved. I have not come to offer the last prayer over the corpse of the Mughal Empire. I have come to tell you something in the name of your honour and mine.

SALMA: Well? I am listening.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Our learned people tell us that the Company's Government wishes to convert us to Christianity, and if it continues we shall lose our faith. Our Nawabs and Rajahs, who were

symbols of our national government, tell us that they are being deprived of territory and authority in such a way that in a few years nothing will be left to them. Our soldiers have been given cartridges greased with the fat of cows and pigs and other animals, the caps of which they have to bite off. All our trade is passing into the hands of the British. Our markets are dumped with foreign goods and our craftsmen have to give up their ancestral professions if they do not wish to starve. Education is now in the hands of the Company, and we shall either remain ignorant or learn just what the British wish to teach us. Everything that we hold dear is now in danger and if we do not make a last attempt to save it, all will be lost.

SALMA: Was it necessary to come like a thief in the night to tell me all this?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: The thoughts that come into my mind also came like thieves in the night. They awakened me from sleep and now they keep me awake. (*Silence.*) For about a year and a half now chapatis are being distributed all over the country. Those who were given chapatis ate a bit and passed them on to others. No one has told me what this means, but I ate my bit of chapati and passed it on, because I felt it was some mysterious means of creating unity of purpose among us. Some time ago I heard Maulana Ahmadullah speak. There were thousands who had come to hear him. People of all sorts—rich, poor, women of aristocratic fami-

lies, the famous singer of Delhi, Munni (SALMA is startled). I do not wish to try your patience any longer. I just wish to tell you that after listening to Maulana Ahmadullah my ideas have changed: my plans have changed: my whole being has changed. I was wondering what I should do, but Fate has lightened my task. The day before yesterday, the soldiers mutinied at Meerut. The fire lighted there has spread to Delhi. I have now resolved to give up my profession, to eradicate the desire for a happy and satisfied life—to attach myself to some man of God and to die fighting by his side.

SALMA: And I suppose if a man of God is not available, a God-fearing courtesan or a desperate tabla-player will do!

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: For one who has accepted the ultimate fate of being hanged, there is no reason to feel embarrassed if a God-fearing courtesan or a desperate tabla-player is also hanged with him.

SALMA: And I suppose he has no reason to think of the hopes that he will smother and the longings that he will strangle by getting himself hanged?

(MOHAMMAD YUSUF hangs his head. SALMA looks at him steadily for a while, then begins to weep aloud. Two WOMEN SERVANTS come running from inside the dalan to the right. Behind them follow AHSANULLAH and RAJAB ALI KOTWAL. SALMA sits down on the ground and continues to cry.)

FIRST WOMAN: O Bibi! What has happened?

SECOND WOMAN: And how has this fellow got in here? Alas! There is no regard for decency now.

FIRST WOMAN: See how bold the fellow is! He just won't move.

SECOND WOMAN: You ill-fated creature! How have you got here?

AHSANULLAH (*advances towards MOHAMMAD YUSUF, catches him by the shoulder and turns him round*): You, who are you . . . Yusuf! What brings you here? (*to the WOMEN SERVANTS*) Away!—you are not required. (*To MOHAMMAD YUSUF.*) I didn't know you had joined those waging a war against decency.

(MOHAMMAD YUSUF does not reply.)

RAJAB ALI (*gazing fixedly at YUSUF*): It seems sometimes one has to disregard some laws of decency in order to maintain decency itself. I know why he has come. He could not have said in any other way what he wanted to say.

AHSANULLAH: What is this delicate or complicated affair which he could not have discussed in any other way?

RAJAB ALI: He has resolved to join in the fight and he wishes to be relieved of all the responsibilities he has undertaken. I think his coming here means that the marriage which was arranged will not now take place.

AHSANULLAH: Is that it, Yusuf?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes.

AHSANULLAH: And could you not have come and told me that?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes, I could.

AHSANULLAH: Then why did you perform this acrobatic trick of jumping over a wall at night? Very well: you can go. We have no rights over you and you have no rights over us.

(SALMA gets up quickly and goes towards the dalan, as if she wanted to precede MOHAMMAD YUSUF.)

Salma, where are you going?

SALMA: Where it was arranged that I should go.

AHSANULLAH: There is no point in going there now. You are not needed there.

SALMA: I am.

AHSANULLAH: Is it true, Mohammad Yusuf, that she is needed?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes, she is.

AHSANULLAH: Young man, have you quite gone out of your mind? You have just confessed that you came here like a thief in the night to tell her that your marriage with her could not come off.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes, that also is true. This is not the time to think of marriage.

AHSANULLAH: Then what do you mean? Will you take the girl to the mutineers' camp and leave her there?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: The girl herself will decide what she will do.

AHSANULLAH: You mean *this* girl? Salma?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes.

AHSANULLAH: Salma—do you hear what he is saying?

SALMA: Yes.

AHSANULLAH: And still you will go with him?

SALMA: Yes.

AHSANULLAH (*intensely angry*): Very well. Get out of here!

(In the meantime there is increasing noise to the right of the stage. SOLDIERS have forced their way into the house—a few of them drunk. SALMA, on seeing them, retreats and comes and stands near AHSANULLAH.)

FIRST SOLDIER: Say—which of you is Ahsanullah?

RAJAB ALI: Who are you? Who has sent you here?

SECOND SOLDIER (*mockingly*): First you tell us who you are.

RAJAB ALI: I am the Kotwal of the city. If you do anything improper here I shall see that you are punished.

SECOND SOLDIER: Who cares whether you are the Kotwal or not? At the moment you are unarmed.

(One SOLDIER advances towards RAJAB ALI, another towards AHSANULLAH. Some of the rest look on while others start searching the house. SALMA springs at the SOLDIER approaching AHSANULLAH and plunges the dagger in his arm. He cries out and jumps back. MOHAM-

MAD YUSUF and RAJAB ALI threaten the other soldier from opposite sides. He also retreats.)

THIRD SOLDIER: Hey! Where are the guns? Let's put these creatures up against the wall and shoot them.

FOURTH SOLDIER (*coming out of the dalan*): Here, shut up. Don't talk about shooting. Sidhari Singh is patrolling this Mohalla. He'll be here as quick as lightning if you fire a shot.

THIRD SOLDIER: He can go to hell. What will he do if he comes here?

FOURTH SOLDIER: He'll stand you up against the wall and shoot you, just as you want to shoot these people—so stop bragging and threatening. Just take what you can find and slip out.

THE WOUNDED SOLDIER: And will no-one punish this bitch for having bitten me in the arm?

SALMA (*springing towards the SOLDIER*): Why take revenge for a bite? Take a life for a life.

(*The wounded soldier falls back hurriedly. MOHAMMAD YUSUF steps forward and places himself between the SOLDIER and SALMA.*)

FIFTH SOLDIER (*from inside the dalan*): I say, it's time to run away now—Sidhari Singh is somewhere near.

THIRD SOLDIER: The fellow doesn't stop to think that if we do the fighting we must get something in return.

FIFTH SOLDIER: Oh look! He's here!

(The SOLDIERS retreat towards the back of the stage. AHSANULLAH, RAJAB ALI, MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SALMA move towards the left front. SIDHARI SINGH enters with five armed SOLDIERS.)

SIDHARI SINGH (*entering from the dalan and looking around*): Wali Dad! Rahim! Sukhdeo! Stand ready with your guns. If any one of those scoundrels moves, shoot him down. Hira! Ask each one to step forward by turn. Tear off his uniform and hand-cuff him. Quick!

(*The soldiers do as they are ordered. When they have finished, they stand in a line facing him.*)

SIDHARI SINGH: Wali Dad and Sukhdeo! March these fellows off. Take them to Santosh Pande. Tell him they are to be hanged at once, and he is to announce by beat of drum that miscreants are being hanged. Those who don't believe it can come and see for themselves.

(WALI DAD and SUKHDEO march off with the prisoners. SIDHARI SINGH then advances slowly towards the left, where AHSANULLAH and the others are standing. It seems he is so tired that he can barely walk. When he recognises the people he stops and salutes.)

SIDHARI SINGH: I ask your pardon for the distress

these scoundrels have caused you. I have already shot ten and hanged two in the bazar, but nothing seems to have any effect.

AHSANULLAH: You have saved us and for this we shall be ever grateful. But this should serve to remind you that when there is mutiny there is always indiscriminate rioting and plunder. If you don't like the one, you should not like the other.

SIDHARI SINGH: Till tonight we could be called mutineers. Now we are soldiers of the Emperor's army. Now it is those who fight against us that are rebels, whether Indians or Englishmen—and those who do not help us are traitors.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF (*stepping forward*): General, you are very tired. Why not sit down on this bed and rest for a while?

SIDHARI SINGH: If I sit I shall not be able to prevent myself from lying down, and if I lie down I shall go to sleep. Then I don't know when I shall awaken. I think I shall rest only after I am satisfied that there are no more disturbances in the city.

RAJAB ALI: I am the Kotwal. Looking after the citizens is my business. Come along with me to the Kotwali. Place a hundred or two hundred soldiers at my disposal. I shall post them at strategic points and stop the plundering.

SIDHARI SINGH: Just at this moment no one is taking orders from anyone. I have been patrolling this city with twenty to twenty-five loyal soldiers. I happened to get hold of. I have had to send

them off in twos and fours. I can't shoot the plunderers inside the houses, and if I send them to jail, I have to find the people who will guard them.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: If you promise to give me the arms, I can find you volunteers.

(SALMA snatches a shawl from the bed and walks quickly towards the dalan, wrapping it around herself.)

SIDHARI SINGH: Yes—arms are available.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Well then, you go to the Kotwali. I shall be there in a while with fifty volunteers—or if you entrust me with the arms, I shall distribute them among the volunteers and bring them to you.

SIDHARI SINGH: You can take the arms if you like, and I give you authority to shoot down any soldier whom you catch plundering. Rahim! Hira! Let us go now.

(MOHAMMAD YUSUF, RAJAB ALI, SIDHARI SINGH and the soldiers follow. AHSANULLAH is left alone.)

(Curtain)

ACT THREE

A big dalan in which carpets and big ornamental pillows and bolsters are arranged. On one side GENERAL BAKHT KHAN is sitting on a low divan. He is reading a report. A CLERK is standing near him. Seated in front of him, in no particular order, are COLONEL GAURI SHANKAR, SIDHARI SINGH, MOHAMMAD YUSUF, RAJA NAHAR SINGH, RAM SAHAY MAL, RAJAB ALI KOTWAL and some more CLERKS. A few SOLDIERS are standing behind BAKHT KHAN.

BAKHT KHAN (*throwing aside the report*): In this army there is just no one who listens to what I say. They make a show of being brave, and when they strut it seems they'll conquer the earth. Then they go and get beaten up and run back. Gauri Shankar, my son, I told you not to send so many men—even you don't listen to me.

GAURI SHANKAR: General, I just can't do anything. If I send five soldiers, fifty ghazis and idealists and dreamers follow them. I can't keep them away. They are not frightened by bayonets and we haven't any spare gun-powder to use on such people.

BAKHT KHAN: Don't talk rubbish. One doesn't kill one's own people.

RAJA NAHAR SINGH: General, I put in a request some time ago for soldiers. If you could just

drill these ghazis and enthusiasts a bit and send them to me, I could use them for a lot of purposes.

BAKHT KHAN: Yes, Raja Sahib, my son, I remember you did . . . but then what happened? (To SIDHARI SINGH) Son, did I ask you to see to their drilling?

SIDHARI SINGH: Yes sir, you did. The same day I got together about five hundred people. When I got them examined it was found that some had dysentery, some had tuberculosis, some were suffering from seasonal fevers, and no one was up to the military standard of physique and health. Out of the five hundred, I discarded three hundred. Of the remainder, about one hundred and fifty said they were people with families and couldn't live in the camp. Some said they would live in the camp if arrangements were made for fetching their food from their homes. In the end I was left with about fifty men. These are being drilled and it seems will turn out quite good soldiers. Yusuf is their Commander.

BAKHT KHAN: Fifty out of five hundred is not at all bad, my son. When I was recruited, about a thousand selected men had been brought for examination, and out of these only a hundred were found good enough. Yusuf, my son, how have you found these fellows?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I think they are a fine lot. They have withstood fire at the bastions—they have attacked and resisted attacks—and acted

all the time according to orders.

GAURI SHANKAR: But how many of these would be ghazis and enthusiasts?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I don't know how many of them are ghazis, but every mother's son is an enthusiast, fighting in the name of God. They all know under what circumstances they have to fight, how much hope there is of victory, and what fate awaits them in case of defeat. But they are always happy, always willing to risk their lives. They count their wounds with pride; they help the citizens in every way they can; they never hesitate to obey orders. I don't see how disciplined and well-bred soldiers could behave better.

BAKHT KHAN: Gauri Shankar, my son, I think something has gone wrong inside you. When you go out to fight, all the ghazis and wild enthusiasts seem to surround you, but Sidhari Singh and Yusuf have never made this complaint. What is worse, wherever you are in command, I lose too many men. Sidhari Singh, my son, will you take over Gauri Shankar's job? If you prepare the papers, I will sign them.

SIDHARI SINGH (*standing up and saluting*): Sir, it will not be possible for me to fulfil the duties of this post all by myself. If you put Captain Mohammad Yusuf in charge of the work along with me, I think we'll be able to do it to your satisfaction.

BAKHT KHAN: Very well, son—let's try this also (SIDHARI SINGH *salutes again*). Raja Sahib, we

haven't discussed your business at all. How many men do you need?

NAHAR SINGH: General, I need men all right, but you know what the Jats are. Catch hold of anyone, put him in a uniform—and you have a soldier. What I really need is money.

BAKHT KHAN: Why talk to me about money? There is Seth Ram Sahay Mal sitting near you.

RAM SAHAY MAL: General, I have gone out of business. You can take my house, you can take my account books and ledgers—anything you can find anywhere, you can take as a gift from me. I am completely beaten. When I come to you I am asked for money in the proper way. When I go back home I find that my house has been raided and even the dust has been put through a fine sieve. My condition has become known to people far and wide—I have no longer any credit.

BAKHT KHAN: Seth Sahib, I know all that. There won't be anything in your house. The account books and ledgers are kept by your own men. I don't suspect that you have bags of gold coins in your house. But you know the ways of business and I don't. You know whether a man is good to do business with; I don't. Even if I go out to buy vegetables once in a way, I am never sure of what I'll bring home. That is why I look to you for support. If you say that no supplies can be provided, it is almost like my Sidhari Singh saying that he cannot fight any more. As far as the looting is concerned, my son Gauri

Shankar knows much more about it. It is something you should talk to him about.

GAURI SHANKAR: General, this is a very serious accusation! (*Standing up*) If you have such suspicions about me, I think I must get out.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, I don't know anything about accusations. What I do know is that we had stopped all plundering in the city (GAURI SHANKAR *salutes and goes out*). Yes, Seth Sahib, so tell us how we are to find money for Raja Sahib. I wish you could give him twenty or twenty-five thousand rupees today or tomorrow.

RAM SAHAY MAL: General, where am I to get all this money from?

BAKHT KHAN: He who made Sidhari Singh a soldier made you a Seth. Ask Him where the money is to come from—but Raja Sahib must have the money. If he sits here waiting as a candidate for his turn, the road to Mathura will be closed.... Raja Sahib, you'd better go to Seth Sahib some time in the evening. He is a large-hearted man.... All right, Seth Sahib, you can go if you like, and Raja Sahib, you also have your work to do.

(RAJA NAHAR SINGH and RAM SAHAY MAL go out. A SOLDIER comes in with some papers and hands them to BAKHT KHAN, who passes them on to MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH.)

BAKHT KHAN: Well, what's the news?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Here's the news of the city.

BAKHT KHAN: No. Don't worry about that.

SIDHARI SINGH: In their attack from the Qudsia Garden side, the enemy lost 20 killed, 60 wounded. The patrol we sent out from the Ajmere Gate towards Motia Khand looted some houses and came back. The enemy is reported to be making preparations for an attack in the direction of Metcalfe House.

BAKHT KHAN: What about the work I assigned to you?

SIDHARI SINGH: That's ready, Sir.

(The SOLDIER comes in again)

SOLDIER: Sir, a Maulvi Sahib has just arrived. He says he must see you at once.

BAKHT KHAN: Another Maulvi Sahib? Very well, son, ask him to come in too. *(The SOLDIER goes out.)* Yusuf, my son, it seems my growing a beard has been a complete waste of effort. Nobody has thought fit to call me a Maulvi.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: General, I have heard that the Emperor Aurangzeb never rewarded a Sayed for bravery.

SIDHARI SINGH: General, why did you ask Yusuf this question and not me?

BAKHT KHAN: Because it is a Muslim's privilege to be deceived by a beard.

(A man of about 30, with the appearance and manner of a MAULVI, comes in and says

"As Salaam Aleikum" *in a loud voice.* BAKHT KHAN *looks at him steadily for a while before replying.*)

BAKHT KHAN: Waleikum, my son. Yes, what have you to say?

MAULVI: I have been sent by Hazrat Maulana Ahmadullah Shah.

BAKHT KHAN: Yes, my son.

MAULVI: Hazrat Maulana thinks that the leaders of this national war should find an opportunity to come together so that they might fight according to a common plan.

BAKHT KHAN: Yes, and so that if the British want to they can catch the whole lot of them at once!

MAULVI: That cannot happen if proper arrangements are made.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, I am sitting here: nearby on the Ridge is the British Army. Those people find out everything about us. Well, and what else?

MAULVI: Hazrat Maulana has said that it is wrong for us to confine ourselves within four or five cities. In this way we give the British a chance of calling together their armies, even from great distances. We ought to scatter ourselves over the whole country and fight everywhere.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, it has occurred to me also that it may be wrong for us to confine ourselves inside cities. Look at the situation in Delhi—it is hard for us to feed the army, and if we feed the army, it is possible that thousands and thou-

sands of the citizens will starve. But then, you can see for yourself, if we leave Delhi, what will happen. The British will take possession of the city and we shall be wandering in the wilderness like thieves and robbers. . . . No, son—you let us remain here. We'll fight as long as we can, and then—we'll see.

MAULVI: So what shall I tell Hazrat Maulana?

BAKHT KHAN: My son, have you come riding on the wind? Why not sit down, have a little rest, tell us how Maulana Sahib is doing—talk of this and that . . .

MAULVI: Hazrat Maulana ordered me to consult you and return as soon as possible.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, I also have had the privilege of serving Maulana Sahib. He is not the sort of person to send anyone two hundred miles just for a thing like this. It seems to me, son, that you are a proper Maulvi. Now tell me, why didn't Maulana Sahib give you anything in writing?

MAULVI (*confused*): There wasn't time for it.

(*All laugh*)

BAKHT KHAN: Now, don't tell me stories! It seems to me you are one of the super-ghazis. You don't get any satisfaction till you gallop your horse in the way of the Lord. I believe you just overheard Maulana Sahib say something—you thought, "Let's go and consult Bakht Khan". Now you will rush off from here to the Maulana

Sahib: you will say, "Bakht Khan says this . . . Now what shall we do?" (BAKHT KHAN again looks steadily at the MAULVI, who gets so embarrassed that all laugh at him.) You really mean you have to go at once?

MAULVI: Yes, I must return at once.

BAKHT KHAN: Very well. Yusuf, my son, could you draft a nice letter to Maulana Sahib, so that he may know there are properly educated people in Delhi also. Tell him all about the situation here and say that we'll do as he commands. I have the very greatest respect for him.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Very well, sir.

BAKHT KHAN (to the MAULVI): And you, my son, go and wait outside.

(MOHAMMAD YUSUF motions to a CLERK and they move off to one side. The CLERK takes a sheet of paper out of his bag and begins writing to dictation from MOHAMMAD YUSUF. At the same time loud cries of "Allah-o-Akhbar" are heard and a group of MEN and WOMEN armed with old and rusty weapons marches in. When they see BAKHT KHAN they stop and say "As-Salaam Aleikum" in a loud voice. BAKHT KHAN looks at them and shakes his head.)

BAKHT KHAN (quietly): Waleikum, Waleikum. What country do you come from, my friends?

A JEHADI: We have come from Tonk to perform the Jihad.

BAKHT KHAN: Tonk, Tonk . . . isn't that the place

where these English took a Thug and made him the Nawab? Have you been sent by that fellow?

JEHADI: No, sir. Nawab Amir Ali Khan is dead. We have nothing to do with the present Nawab. We have come to fight and die for our faith.

BAKHT KHAN: Then why did you come all this way, my son? Couldn't you find anyone to kill nearer home?

JEHADI: We have come to fight the Christian Government and the British.

BAKHT KHAN: But, my son, you know in the army here we have both Hindus and Muslims. Don't think it possible that the Hindu will fight and you will win, that the Hindu will die and you will go to Heaven. If you want to live here in Delhi, don't ask for more than your share. I am not going to show favours to anyone, or to guarantee a place in Heaven to anyone.

JEHADI: No, sir. We don't ask for any favours. We have come to fight to the last.

BAKHT KHAN: And you will fight as I want you to?

JEHADI: Yes, sir.

BAKHT KHAN: Undertsand me well, my son. I also can use the name of Allah. If you don't obey me I shall take the name of Allah and blow you off with a gun.

JEHADI: Sir, we agree to this.

BAKHT KHAN: Very well— now Sidhari Singh, my son, have a look at these fellows and select those you think good enough. The others you send to the Old Man in the Fort, to serve as watchmen.

(SIDHARI SINGH gets up and salutes.) And what are these women doing here?

JEHADI WOMAN: We have also come to fight and die by the side of our men.

BAKHT KHAN: My daughter, if you want to die, your house would be a much better place. Lie down on your bed and die there. Dying in front of me won't do any good to you or to me—and don't tell me that you will be able to fight like soldiers. That is not your business.

JEHADI WOMAN: You send us into battle and see.

BAKHT KHAN: I am not going to send you into battle just like this. You will know how to die if you first learn how to fight. And remember, we are not short of corpses. So, my daughter, you first learn to drill.

JEHADI WOMAN: We are quite prepared to learn military drill.

BAKHT KHAN: Very well. But let me tell you, if you can't stand the drilling you will be sent to the kitchen to light fires.

(MUNNI comes in and stands behind the JEHADI WOMEN. She is wrapped in a green shawl.)

JEHADI WOMAN: We accept every condition.

BAKHT KHAN: Yusuf, my son, would you be able to look after these women?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes, General; Munni Begum has made arrangements for women who have joined the army in a particular mohallah. (See-

ing MUNNI) Look! She has come herself.

BAKHT KHAN: Who is this Munni Begum?

MUNNI (*comes forward and salutes*): Sir, I have been in military service from the very beginning.

BAKHT KHAN: But no one has told me about it.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Sir, she made us take an oath that we would not mention her to you.

BAKHT KHAN: Oh! There are such women also?

MUNNI: Yes, sir. There are such women. Raja Nahar Singh's Rani, Kishan Kunwar, has been with us all the time. Mohammad Yusuf Sahib's fiancée, Salma Begum, was with me at a bastion near the Kashmere Gate. She was wounded for the first time and felt proud and happy.

BAKHT KHAN (*looking carefully at MUNNI*): Listen. Are you called "The Woman in Green"?

MUNNI: No, sir. That is an old woman of 70.

BAKHT KHAN: I see. And at the moment you are a young woman. . . . Very well, my daughter, take your sisters away.

(All the women go out)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF (*to the JEHADE*): You people also go and wait outside. I shall be with you at once. (*He begins dictating again. The JEHADE go out.*)

BAKHT KHAN: Rajab Ali, my brother, I fear this: will not be forgiven.

RAJAB ALI: What do you mean?

BAKHT KHAN: You have just seen for yourself. These Jehadis—men and women. Not one of them.

knows how to fight, but they are all willing to die—and here am I, with twenty to twenty-five thousand soldiers, and I cannot dislodge the British from the Ridge. If only I had some competence!

RAJAB ALI: General, you are not lacking in competence. Your hands are tied. His Majesty is old and weak, the Princes are all worthless fellows and Mirza Elahi Baksh behaves openly in such a way as if he had been appointed by the British to do us all possible harm. And then there are so many rowdies and goondas in the city that we don't have a moment's peace and cannot attend to the war as we should. What could you possibly do?

BAKHT KHAN: No, my brother. All this just means that I have not enough courage and ability. It is I who can't do anything.

(A MESSENGER comes in)

MESSENGER: His Majesty wishes to see the Commander-in-Chief Bahadur.

BAKHT KHAN: Look—now the Old Man has sent for me. (*To the MESSENGER*) Very well, my son, very well. Tell him I shall come at once. (*The MESSENGER leaves.*) Rajab Ali, my brother, will you keep an eye on Gauri Shankar? He is doing us a lot of harm.

RAJAB ALI: General, he, like Prince Elahi Baksh, has entrenched himself so firmly amongst us that it is impossible to shake him off. If you take

any steps against him all the businessmen in Delhi will turn against you.

BAKHT KHAN: Yes, that's true. (*Standing up*) Well, now I must go for a while to see the Old Man. (*Recollecting something*) Oh, yes! Sidhari Singh, my son, come near me, and call Yusuf also. (*They both come close to him.*) Look. We are having great difficulties with the supplies now. I think what we should do is to send out a couple of platoons in different directions to collect supplies—but don't let Gauri Shankar know, otherwise they will all be caught. I think you had better ask the Raja Sahib where to send these platoons, and see that they have all the carts necessary to bring supplies.

RAJAB ALI: I think I could give some advice also. You might consult me too.

BAKHT KHAN: Very well. You three sit together and make a plan. Tell me what you decide. And see that these platoons are of fresh recruits.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF }
SIDHARI SINGH } Very well, sir.

(BAKHT KHAN *leaves, followed by two SOLDIERS*)

RAJAB ALI: Now the situation appears to be very critical.

SIDHARI SINGH: But when was it hopeful?

RAJAB ALI: Formerly the General used to get vexed when things went wrong—now he is depressed and almost dispirited.

SIDHARI SINGH: I don't think he ever thought we'd

win this war. He is a person of age and experience: even rash and inexperienced fellows like me never hoped to win.

RAJAB ALI: Yes. Perhaps at the moment he is grieved because the light he saw in the eyes of the Jihadis would soon be put out.

(Curtain)

ACT FOUR

(The last days of the siege of Delhi. The administration and the army have become completely disorganised. SIDHARI SINGH and MOHAMMAD YUSUF, uniformed and armed, are patrolling the northern and north-western part of the city.)

Scene I

(A crossroads. SIDHARI SINGH and MOHAMMAD YUSUF are standing, right front, looking at a map. A SOLDIER is standing by at attention.)

SIDHARI SINGH: Well, I just don't know how we are to give orders and have them carried out. *(To SOLDIER)* Look, use your wits, understand what I am saying. First, go to the Kashmere Gate bastion, tell Capt. Allah Bakhsh to be on the alert. The British are going to try and blow up the gate; that must be prevented at all costs. Then go to Ghanshyam Singh at Mori Gate. Tell him of the impending attack. He is to fire at the enemy's flank. Both will ask for ammunition. Say it's being sent up. Now go. Quick! *(SOLDIER salutes and goes.)*

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: It was most unfortunate our missing the opportunity yesterday. If only a couple of thousand men had advanced from the Sabzi Mandi side, we could easily have sur-

rounded and disposed of the main enemy forces.

SIDHARI SINGH: Now our only hope is gone. General Bakht Khan's orders are countermanded and no other orders are given. That is what explains our slackness yesterday. But we must carry on.

(After a while some persons wrapped in burqahs appear on the left. From their heavy bodies and their gait it is obvious that they are men.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF *(walking up and stopping them in front)*: Stop! Where are you going?

(SIDHARI SINGH has in the meantime gone round the back)

FIRST PERSON IN BURQAH *(in a feminine voice)*:
My son, I am a poor old woman!

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Very well, granny, but let's have a look at your face.

(MOHAMMAD YUSUF tries to snatch the burqah away, but cannot do it. He hits the person in the burqah on the head with his pistol butt and when the person falls down he drags the burqah from the feet. The others stand and look on, dazed.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Oh! This is a soldier. I see: it has come to this now—that you want to run off disguised as women!

SECOND PERSON IN BURQAH (*taking off his burqah and throwing it away*): Yes, it has come to this. You don't give us anything to eat. You don't give us arms and ammunition. You order us to go and fight and you yourselves carry on secret correspondence with the British. If we remain at our posts, the British will catch us and hang us. If we try to run away, you shoot us from behind. Only yesterday you shot three men and hanged two. What else can we do except run away disguised as women?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: What you say is true. Now run away if you can. I'll shoot you from behind. Anyone who dies will be left to rot and anyone who is caught wounded will be hanged. If you want to die the death of deserters like this, you can do it. If you want to die on the battlefield like men, you can do that. If you want arms, there is a small arsenal near Kashmere Gate—go there. If you don't find arms there, look for them on your own elsewhere.

(The SOLDIERS take off their burqahs and fall in ranks. The SOLDIER on the ground gets up, rubbing his head, and joins them. Then one of them says "March" and they all march out towards the right. In the meantime, shouts of "Say, Victory to the Kahars!" are heard, and about fifteen KAHARS enter from the left, walking at a rapid pace. MOHAMMAD YUSUF holds up his hand to stop them. The KAHARS stop and, after some hesitation, salute him.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Stop! Where are you friends going?

FIRST KAHAR: Sir, we were going to one of the bastions.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Which bastion?

FIRST KAHAR: Oh, sir. Some bastion on the Kashmere Gate side.

SIDHARI SINGH: Or on the Mori Gate side, or on the Lahore Gate side. Who the devil told you to march towards the bastions?

SECOND KAHAR: Well sir. Nobody has told us to. You know, these days we have nothing to do. We were all of us sitting around yesterday evening. All at once Sultan said, "I want to hit an Englishman with my lathi": and then Manglu said "Don't brag. You haven't the courage to stand before an Englishman and look him in the eye." And then Sultan said, "Bring an Englishman and ask him to stand in front of me. I'll stare at the fellow in such a way that he'll be dazed and fall on the ground": and then we all said, "There's no way of getting an Englishman—let's go to their camp and catch one": and then Ghasita said, "Friends, it's a shame that there's been such a big war and we've been just sitting at home practising our strokes": and then Buddhu said, "Friends, I've heard that there's a bastion near the Kashmere Gate that our army has deserted. I'm dead sure the English will try to get in that way". And then Manglu said to Sultan, "Sultan, my son, now you have the chance not only to fight with your eyes but to

show the power of your arms". And then all of us said, "We could show the power of our arms too—why don't we all go together?"

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: And so you are all going together to join battle. Grand! And what will you fight with?

SECOND KAHAR: Oh! What could we fight with? We have only got these sticks.

SIDHARI SINGH: And you want to match these sticks against guns?

FIRST KAHAR: Yes, we do—and if you want to see the fun, come along.

THIRD KAHAR: You know, sir, it's not only arms that matter. We rely on our agility and cunning.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Why do you fellows want to get into trouble for nothing? You won't be able to do the British any harm with your sticks, but you'll be reckoned among the rebels. . . . If the British win, you'll all be hanged.

FOURTH KAHAR: What happens later we are not worried about just now. Now we all want to fight.

OTHER KAHARS: "Quite right." "Come along, Bud-dhu." "I say, my hands are itching"—and so on.

(They again fall in ranks and get ready to march. MOHAMMAD YUSUF motions them with his hand to proceed. The KAHARS march out, shouting their slogan.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: What will be the end of these fellows?

SIDHARI SINGH: What can be the end? Either these fellows will run away when the enemy starts firing or they'll get killed.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: What bastion were they talking about?

SIDHARI SINGH: Perhaps they were talking about the bastion where the soldiers in burqahs had been posted.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I wouldn't be surprised.

(A SOLDIER comes in running)

SOLDIER *(to MOHAMMAD YUSUF)*: Sir, the British have advanced up to the Kashmere Gate. We forced them back three times, but now we are running out of ammunition.

SIDHARI SINGH: Ammunition is being sent. But it may be delayed. Mohammad Isa is waiting with 1,500 Jehadis on the Water Gate side for orders to attack. Tell him to attack at once. If he shows any hesitation, report at once. *(To YUSUF)* Do you know the whereabouts of Munni Begum?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Munni Begum was with the Jehadis today. Most probably she will remain with them.

SIDHARI SINGH *(to SOLDIER)*: Do you know Munni Begum?

SOLDIER: Yes, Sir.

SIDHARI SINGH: Find out where she is and tell her about the orders you have been given *(SOLDIER leaves)*.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: It will not be easy to find out

where Munni Begum is. She was preparing plans for fighting within the city and was looking for houses from which sniping would be possible.

(A YOUNG MAN enters from the right. His appearance is that of a student at a seminary. He is carrying a rusty old sword. Seeing MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH he advances towards them.)

YOUNG MAN: Sir, you look like a soldier. Can you tell me where the fighting is to take place today?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: That's a military secret.

YOUNG MAN: I see . . . *(looking suspiciously at MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH)* You aren't joking, are you?

SIDHARI SINGH: We do joke sometimes.

YOUNG MAN: But this war is not a thing to joke about!

SIDHARI SINGH: Why?

YOUNG MAN: This is a war in which we are fighting for our country and our faith.

SIDHARI SINGH: In this war also people get killed and wounded, so if soldiers get a chance to joke, why shouldn't they make use of it?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Maulana, why do you ask useless questions? Why not come to the point?

YOUNG MAN: I heard last evening that our soldiers were deserting their posts. All night I was thinking that I had not had the decency to do anything for the cause. If on the Day of Judge-

ment I am asked why I did not participate in this holy war, what answer shall I give?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: So you got up, took an old and rusty sword from your lumber-room and set out to fight the holy war.

YOUNG MAN: Yes. I have not wielded the sword so far, but I feel that if I see the enemy in front of me I shall get worked up and do something.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Maulana, if you aspire to martyrdom, why take all this trouble? If the British capture the city your beard will bear witness against you, and you will be caught and hanged.

YOUNG MAN: I see. That means in any case I stand in danger of losing my life!

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes.

YOUNG MAN: In that case, the law requires that I should get the consent of my parents even for staying in Delhi.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Yes, my friend. I would advise you to go at once to your native place and get the consent of your parents for staying on in Delhi.

(The sound of CHILDREN talking to each other is heard towards the left. "Oh! not that way . . ." "Come this way." "Come, we must be quick." "Friends, hurry!"—and so on. About twelve CHILDREN of the ages of 12 to 14 enter from the left. They are wearing the uniforms of the Boys' Brigade. As soon as MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH see

them, they run and hold them up.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Children, where are you going? And with whose permission?

A BOY: Our Commander has asked us to report at the Mori Gate. Please let us go.

SIDHARI SINGH: It is not permitted to go there. Fighting may start there soon.

SECOND BOY: It's for fighting that we are going there.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF (*threateningly*): Who has told you to go and fight?

FIRST BOY: Our Commander.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Who is your Commander? He has no authority to give such orders.

SECOND BOY: How do you know he has no authority? And what authority have you to stop us?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF }
SIDHARI SINGH } We shall not let you go.

(The BOYS, seeing that their way is being barred, make a rush. All escape except two or three, who run about the stage with MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH trying to catch them. In the end they also escape. When they have gone the YOUNG MAN also follows them slowly.)

SIDHARI SINGH: Yusuf, if the children of a people run so joyfully to certain death ...

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: That people will live, no matter how many lives are lost.

(Curtain)

ACT FOUR

Scene II

(The same place about two hours later. When the curtain goes up the stage is empty. The sounds of firing and the cries of soldiers and citizens are heard from all sides. After a while, MOHAMMAD YUSUF enters from the left and walks slowly towards the right. He looks this way and that, and then sits down on the ground. When he hears the slogan "Say, Victory to the Kahars", he gets up. Six KAHARS enter from the right. One of them is being supported by two comrades. Their clothes are blood-stained, but they all look happy. When they see MOHAMMAD YUSUF they stop and salute. The wounded KAHAR groans and sits down on the ground.)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Well friends! What have you done?

FIRST KAHAR: Oh, sir! We've had the best of life today.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Really?

SECOND KAHAR: Oh, sir! We showed such strokes that it was a delight.

THIRD KAHAR: Sir, as we approached the bastion we saw that about thirty of the enemy had come inside the wall.

SECOND KAHAR: So we hid ourselves on both sides

of the road. As soon as the enemy got near, Sultan rushed out and hit a man so hard on the face that it got bashed in. One man wanted to bayonet Sultan, but Buddhu took the blow on his lathi and then, sir, all of us rushed into the fray and Ghasita—he really performed miracles. He sprang on to the shoulders of an English soldier and from there like lightning to the rear of the enemy, and then he swung his stick with such force that he brought down two at one blow.

FIRST KAHAR: Yes, sir. They were so taken aback by the blows of our sticks that they fell back and ran away outside the wall. From there they started firing.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I see. That is why only so few of you have come back.

THIRD KAHAR: Yes, sir. After all, we aren't made of steel, so that if a bullet hits us it is flattened and falls to the ground with a thud. But they'll remember all their lives the blows they got from our sticks.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: All right. But now I'd advise you to get out of the city as soon as possible. Otherwise none of you will survive to tell the tale.

SECOND KAHAR: Of course—now we'll have to go.

(They all get ready to go. When they want to help the wounded KAHAR to his feet, they find that he is dead. Three KAHARS pick up the body quietly and leave in silence. MOHAM-

MAD YUSUF keeps on looking in their direction after they have left. After a while SIDHARI SINGH enters from the right.)

SIDHARI SINGH: What are you looking at?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Those Kahars who went to defend the bastion have just returned. Their courage is amazing. More than half of them have got killed, but what they were telling me about was how they forced a platoon of the enemy out of the city and beyond the wall.

SIDHARI SINGH: They may have pushed a platoon out, but the British army has entered the city from the Kashmere Gate side. It cannot be forced out now.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: Well! Even these last moments will pass.

(Some SOLDIERS are seen running at the back of the stage from the right towards the left. MOHAMMAD YUSUF springs towards them, but SIDHARI SINGH calls him back.)

SIDHARI SINGH: Don't stop them. They might not be running away, but going to occupy positions fixed for them. I think Munni Begum's scheme for fighting inside the city in the Kashmere Gate and Mori Gate areas is being put into operation. Only, now there might be no one to give orders.

(Some BOYS of the Boys' Brigade enter quietly from the right. A wounded boy is

being supported by two others. All their clothes are blood-stained.)

WOUNDED BOY (*crying*): Go away! Let me be—
I can't walk any more!

SECOND BOY: No, no—don't lose heart. We are
near the Fort now. There your wounds will be
dressed and we'll put you to rest on a soft bed.

WOUNDED BOY: Oh-h-h !

THIRD BOY: If you like, three of us could carry you.

WOUNDED BOY: No—that's even more painful!

(The boys go out towards the left)

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: These are all that have
returned.

SIDHARI SINGH: And what if they have returned?

(Silence. From the right MUNNI staggers on to the stage. There are two large stains of blood on her chest. MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH are so surprised that they cannot move. She stands about the middle of the stage, but it is clear that she will not be able to remain standing for long. MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH rush to her side to help her, but she motions them back.)

MUNNI (*smiling*): Yusuf, my task is over now, isn't it? . . . I haven't bowed my head, even to see my wounds!

(MUNNI's face is lighted up with a strange joy and her eyes glitter. She catches hold of YUSUF's hand on one side and SIDHARI SINGH's on the other. Then her eyes close and she falls slowly and gracefully to the ground. MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH straighten her hands and feet, cover her with the green shawl and then stand at attention at her feet. While they are standing, BAKHT KHAN enters from the right with three soldiers. As soon as he sees them, he whispers orders to the soldiers and comes and stands at attention near MUNNI's body. Then he goes slowly towards MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH and puts his hands on their shoulders.)

BAKHT KHAN: My eyes have beheld this also.
What can the British take away from those who
have such riches?

(Curtain)

ACT FOUR

Scene III

(The same place, a few minutes later.)

BAKHT KHAN (to YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH):
I have been looking for you both. You must have heard what has happened. The Old Man has left the city—his women and his Hakim are with him. They have gone and established themselves in Humayun's Tomb. I wonder who they think will protect them there. . . . What I want now is to march out in some direction. There is a chance of continuing the fight in Bareilly or Shahjahanpur or Gwalior. It is possible that the Old Man might agree to come with me. What do you two feel about it?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: General, I want to stay on here. I am afraid that if I leave Delhi I may survive, and life will be such a torture that I shall remain longing for death.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, this is suicide. Our religion doesn't allow it and, besides, tell me—were you fighting against the British or against yourself?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: I was fighting against the British and now my only chance of victory is in surrendering my life.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, you have said something

very profound. I have nothing to say in reply to that. But consider this: if you continue to fight outside Delhi you will still be fighting the British. You will still have the chance of giving your life for the cause.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF (*after some thought*): Yes, General, you are right. But I cannot persuade myself to agree.

BAKHT KHAN: Why not try persuasion on yourself a little more . . . and you, my son, Sidhari—what about you?

SIDHARI SINGH: I am your subordinate. I shall do as you command.

BAKHT KHAN: But what you desire with all your heart is to be left with Yusuf?

SIDHARI SINGH: Yes, sir.

BAKHT KHAN (*shaking his head*): What a strange thing! Two people put their two heads together, but their wisdom is not doubled.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: General, all that we could do with our wisdom we have done. We have lost the battle of wits and the British are capturing the town. Now we shall see what the heart can do.

BAKHT KHAN: My son, tell me honestly—did you ever think that the English would not be able to capture Delhi?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF (*after some thought*): No.

BAKHT KHAN: Then fighting for Delhi was also an affair of the heart. What I am telling you is also something that comes from the heart.

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: General, you don't belong to

Delhi, so you can leave Delhi.

BAKHT KHAN: You don't mean to tell me that you were fighting for Delhi and for that Old Man?

MOHAMMAD YUSUF: No, sir.

BAKHT KHAN: So what, my son?

(MOHAMMAD YUSUF *doesn't* reply. BAKHT KHAN *looks now at* MOHAMMAD YUSUF, *now at* SIDHARI SINGH. A SOLDIER *enters from the left and salutes.*)

SOLDIER: Sir, the preparations for your journey to Humayun's Tomb are complete.

BAKHT KHAN: Very well, my son.

(BAKHT KHAN *looks again at* MOHAMMAD YUSUF *and* SIDHARI SINGH. *Their faces are expressionless. BAKHT KHAN stands at attention. MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH do the same and then salute. BAKHT KHAN takes the salute and then walks slowly towards the left exit. Before going out he stops and looks again at MOHAMMAD YUSUF and SIDHARI SINGH, with eyes full of love and admiration. They remain standing as they were.*)

(Curtain)

ACT FIVE

(A small courtyard and dalan in RAM SAHAY MAL's house. It is late afternoon. A small wick-lamp is burning on a stand, in the light of which RAM SAHAY MAL is having his meal. His wife, BHAGWATI, is standing nearby fanning him. She has covered her face with a corner of her sari and is weeping silently. RAM SAHAY MAL is unaware of this, and continues to eat.)

RAM SAHAY MAL: Well, did you get enough water today?

BHAGWATI (in a tearful voice): Yes—only just now Ram Pershad brought some. He had to go quite a distance—all the wells nearby are filled with corpses.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Ram, Ram! Ram, Ram! . . .
(looking at BHAGWATI) But why are you crying?

BHAGWATI: I want to die too.

RAM SAHAY MAL: But why? Why have you got sick of life all at once?

BHAGWATI: I don't know.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Thank the Paramatma that though a catastrophe has befallen us we have escaped.

BHAGWATI: Yes.

RAM SAHAY MAL: But you have still to be very alert. See that the watchmen don't leave the gates even for a moment.

BHAGWATI: No — I keep on going round all the time.

RAM SAHAY MAL: And see that no one is allowed inside — man, woman or child.

BHAGWATI: No — I couldn't do that.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Why — do you want to get me hanged?

BHAGWATI: No. The fault will be entirely mine. I'll say I've done it without letting you know. But it's impossible for me to refuse asylum if a woman or a child asks for it.

RAM SAHAY MAL (*after looking at BHAGWATI fixedly for a while*): I think you have hidden someone in the house without letting me know. Now only the Paramatma's mercy can save us . . . If you are so tender-hearted, why don't you call me?

BHAGWATI: I don't want you to know about it at all.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Do you think anyone will believe that a man hid himself in my house without my knowing it?

BHAGWATI: I didn't say men — I said women who had lost all their relations and children who were without food and water.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Whose women? Whose children?

BHAGWATI: That is something I don't ask.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Or you have asked and won't tell me. I know there aren't any people in our mohallah, who have taken part in the mutiny. These women and children must have come from

elsewhere. (BHAGWATI sits down on the ground, covers her face and bursts out crying.) Tell me who these people are. Then if there's an enquiry I shall be able to say something. (BHAGWATI shakes her head.) All right, don't tell me. (Silence) When the fighting was going on you were always talking about three or four people . . . Bakht Khan's family wasn't here at all: Sidhari Singh also doesn't belong to Delhi . . . Have you hidden a Muslim woman here? . . . Among Hindu women you are friends only with Rani Kishan Kunwar. Whenever Nahar Singh came to ask for money, he used to send her first to prepare the ground . . . but we don't know whether the Rani is at Ballabgarh or here. In any case, wherever she is, somebody will inform the British about it . . . If they have caught Nahar Singh they will not be looking for her.

BHAGWATI: They have caught him! (She cries still more loudly.)

RAM SAHAY MAL: If they have caught him, then nothing can be done now. You couldn't buy him for his weight in gold . . . So Rani Kishan Kunwar has taken refuge in our house . . . poor woman! . . . (RAM SAHAY MAL cannot eat any more. He pushes the dishes away. He wants to drink water, but he holds the cup in his hand and cannot bring it to his lips.) Is she weeping a great deal?

BHAGWATI (shaking her head): No. She is feeling sorry that she didn't go into the battlefield with

the Jehadi women and die fighting.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Ram, Ram! What courage! . . . Look after her well. I shall come and pay my respects to her some time . . . It's not so very dangerous for her to be in our house. With a Muslim woman it would have been different.

BHAGWATI: There is a Muslim sister also here.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Alas! Who?

BHAGWATI: Salma.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Oh! That Salma — Yusuf Sahib's fiancée. She was also on the battlefield?

BHAGWATI: Yes. She was at the bastions. She fought from the roof-tops. Rani Kishan Kunwar also was firing with her at the enemy; then she was wounded. I don't know how Rani Kishan Kunwar managed to bring her here—I thought she was going to die, but now she is quite strong again. She is considering how she can get out of Delhi and join Bakht Khan's army. Rani Kishan Kunwar says she will go with her too.

RAM SAHAY MAL: Now look, we cannot allow this. I would be prepared to let them remain in hiding here and escape when there is no danger. They could stay here even for a year, but if they go out and are seen fighting somewhere else, then you will be caught and there is no doubt that I shall be hanged . . . And what has happened to Yusuf Sahib?

BHAGWATI: Salma doesn't know.

RAM SAHAY MAL: And if you know, you won't tell.

BHAGWATI: I have heard that he was fighting to the last. He saw a British soldier molesting a woman

in Urdu Bazar and shot him dead. Lots of people were picked up because of this, but he wasn't among them. They say the whole of Urdu Bazar will be demolished with artillery fire: not one house will be left standing.

RAM SAHAY MAL: May the Paramatma help us!

(A WOMAN SERVANT comes in running. She is speechless with fear. Then a MAN SERVANT comes in.)

MAN SERVANT: Sir, there are four soldiers at the gate. They are asking us to open the doors because they want to search the house.

RAM SAHAY MAL: They cannot enter my house. I have a written protection order from the Military Officer.

SERVANT: Sir, they won't listen to us.

BHAGWATI: I have the order. Come, I'll show it to them.

RAM SAHAY MAL: No, this is not an affair for you to meddle in.

BHAGWATI: Who will go if I don't? I have had it announced that you are negotiating with the British commander and are not in the house.

RAM SAHAY MAL: No—you sit here. I am going.

(BHAGWATI quickly puts out the light and runs out. RAM SAHAY MAL goes inside to put the dishes away. After a while BHAGWATI enters from the right, walking backwards. Four SOLDIERS are threatening her with bayonets.)

The FIRST SOLDIER appears to be their commander.)

FIRST SOLDIER: Tell me where those two women are!

BHAGWATI (*in a low, tearful and frightened voice*):

There is no one hiding here.

FIRST SOLDIER: Two women *are* hiding here. Our men saw them fighting, then they were seen coming into this house. Ram Saran, stand this woman against the wall—the other two, shoot her.

(RAM SARAN *comes out and advances towards* BHAGWATI.)

RAM SAHAY MAL (*coming out*): Aren't you people ashamed of yourselves—killing an innocent woman like this?

FIRST SOLDIER: So! Lalaji was himself hiding. He thought his woman, with her wiles, would deceive us and send us off. Ram Saran! Stand him up too along with his woman.

BHAGWATI: Oh! Kill me—but let him be! Oh! he doesn't know anything! He is quite innocent!

FIRST SOLDIER: I see—that's it. He is innocent, but you know where the two women are hiding.

BHAGWATI: Oh! Let him go. Oh! Heaven help me! He doesn't know anything! Oh! Oh-h-h-! . . .

(SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR *enter from a corner on the right side.*)

SALMA: Let these two alone. We have come. You

can punish us as you like: the Seth Sahib and his wife are quite innocent.

FIRST SOLDIER (*after looking closely at SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR*): You look to me like women of this family.

KISHAN KUNWAR: Let these two go. We are willing to come out with you. Thousands of people in the city will identify us.

FIRST SOLDIER: Yes—I should take you outside and in the meantime the real culprits will escape.

SALMA: Just as you like. It's your business to shed innocent blood.

FIRST SOLDIER: All right. Tell us what your names are.

SALMA: Salma.

KISHAN KUNWAR: Kishan Kunwar.

FIRST SOLDIER: You confess your crimes?

SALMA: We have not committed any crime. We have fought for our country and for our Emperor.

FIRST SOLDIER: You have taken part in the fighting?

SALMA: Yes, with heart and soul. We took part in it ourselves. We induced others to join. We fought at the bastions. We shot down enemy soldiers.

KISHAN KUNWAR: We are only sorry we couldn't do more.

FIRST SOLDIER: Very well then! Go and stand against the wall.

SALMA: Why should we stand against the wall? We'll stand in the middle of the courtyard and we'll laugh at your guns.

FIRST SOLDIER: Very well. Let's have it that way. Stand in the middle of the courtyard.

(SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR stand in the middle of the courtyard. At a signal from the FIRST SOLDIER the other three walk back about four paces, kneel on the ground and take aim. BHAGWATI, with a shriek, throws herself between the soldiers and the two women, but faints and falls on the ground. The SOLDIERS have their rifles aimed but do not fire. SALMA's expression is one of wild joy, and she stares fixedly at the muzzles of the guns. KISHAN KUNWAR looks up at the sky in a kind of exaltation. All at once the FIRST SOLDIER kneels down in front of SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR.)

FIRST SOLDIER: Please forgive this impertinence. We just wanted to make sure that you were the women we had been charged with finding.

(This sudden change in the situation is more than SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR can bear. KISHAN KUNWAR shrieks and falls on the ground. SALMA also collapses.)

RAM SAHAY MAL: You beasts! How long will you torture the poor creatures? If you have to kill them, why not do it at once?

FIRST SOLDIER (*extremely apologetic*): We didn't come to trouble them. We came to fulfil their

heart's desire. General Bakht Khan has sent us in the uniforms of British soldiers with orders to search them out and bring them to him. If we don't succeed in taking them to him safe and sound, General Bakht Khan will have us shot. Or we shall be caught by the British and hanged.

(BHAGWATI *has in the meantime got up. She sprinkles water on SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR's faces . . .*)

BHAGWATI: Get up, my beloved, get up. Go and avenge those you loved. Add to the honour of your country.

(SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR *recover slowly. They sit up. BHAGWATI gives them water to drink.*)

FIRST SOLDIER: I fall at your feet again and ask your pardon (SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR *smile weakly*). But I have yet to commit another impertinence. We can take you out of the city only as prisoners. We shall have to tie your hands behind your backs and put nooses round your necks.

(SALMA and KISHAN KUNWAR *look at each other. Then both stand up. The SOLDIERS quickly tie their hands behind their backs and put nooses round their necks. Then one SOL-*

DIER stands at attention in front of them and two behind them. The FIRST SOLDIER gives the order to march. They march out.)

BHAGWATI: Oh! Paramatma! Oh!

(Curtain)

GLOSSARY

Allah-o-Akbar: God is great

Assalam-o-Aleikum: Muslim salutation, meaning,
'May God bestow peace and well-being on
you'

Bibi: Term equivalent to 'Madam' or 'Miss'

Burqah: Garment worn by women observing
Pardah (seclusion) to cover the entire figure

Company Bahadur: The 'title' often used in Urdu
and Persian records for the East India Com-
pany is 'Nawab Company Saheb Bahadur'

Chapatīs: Baked, unleavened bread, round flat and
thin

Dalan: Pillared hall opening out on a courtyard

Dewan Khana: Reception and assembly room in a
nobleman's house

Duffedar: Petty officer of the East India Com-
pany's army

Dupatta: Cloth draped round head and shoulders

Exalted Camp: Term used for the imperial camp
or the palace

Ghazal: Ode

Ghazi: Warrior who achieves victory in a religious
war

Hakim: Physician

Jehad: Literally, 'Striving in the Way of the Lord'.
Generally used for a holy war

Jehadi: Person engaging in a holy war

Kahar: Professional palanquin-bearer

Kotwali: Headquarters of city police

Kotwal: Chief police officer of a city

Lalaji: Term used for businessman, or clerk

Lathi: Stick, staff

Masnad: A seat, slightly raised, with ornate cushions on each side and a large ornate pillow at the back

Mohallah: Ward or part of ward in a town or city

Munshi: Clerk. Person in general charge of affairs of a nobleman

Moulvi: Honorific term for scholar, theologian or learned person

Paramatma: Supreme God

Seth: A businessman of standing; the term is very old

Tabla: A musical instrument, a kind of drum

Waleikum: Abbreviation of *Waleikum-as-Salam*.
The response to *Assalam-o-Aleikum*